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SUBJECT: TNA SPEAKER URGES QUICK GOVERNMENT FORMATION

Classified By: AMBASSADOR KHALILZAD FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) The Ambassador and MNF-I Commanding General (CG) Casey met February 20 with Transitional National Assembly (TNA) Speaker Dr. Hajim al-Hasani. Dr. Hasani described Ibrahim Jafari's PM nomination as an "Iranian trick" and predicted that Jafari will be the PM "whether we like it or not." The Shia Alliance, he added, will stay together, and it will not be possible to lure any members out. He asserted that there are only three ways to mitigate a Jafari prime ministership:

-- Allow Jafari to become PM, create a crisis one or two months later, and then vote out the government;

-- Create the National Security Council;

-- Allow Jafari to become PM but with a formalized agreement on how the government will run, to include two strong Deputy Prime Ministers.

¶12. (C) Dr. Hasani said that government formation should accelerate now and that President Talabani should call the Council of Representatives to start the clock on government formation deadlines. In order to get around the problem of having to know the CoR leadership as part of the package of ministers, he added, the Council should elect people who are almost assuredly going to be ministers (and therefore will resign as Deputy Speaker/Speaker).

¶13. (C) Dr. Hasani also urged a greater role for the UN, adding that it is not good for the U.S. to play the major role in the government formation negotiations. He said that he had met with UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) Qazi, who reportedly told Dr. Hasani

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that he (Qazi) has to stay neutral and will not be more involved if not asked.

¶14. (C) When asked what position he hoped for in the new government, Dr. Hasani answered with Minister of Defense or Deputy Prime Minister. He said he prefers Minister of Defense if there is a solid program, adding that "democracy will not survive without a military to protect it."

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